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BOOK REVIEWS

METHODS AND PRINCIPLES

Religion and Culture. A Critical Survey of Methods of Approach to Religious Phenomena. FREDERICK SCHLEITER, Ph.D. Columbia University Press. New York, 1919. Pp. 206.

To wade through the mazes and the pages of speculation upon religion and its manifestations is no easy task, though several have encompassed it. To give, at the same time, a critical estimate of the various methods of approach is a far more difficult matter, and few have accomplished it. No one, we believe, has reviewed these methods of interpretation either so thoroughly or so intelligently as has Dr. Schleiter in *Religion and Culture*. The theories of anthropologists from the time of De Brosses and of Max Müller have been given more incisive treatment than we can find in any other author with whom the reviewer is acquainted. The fallacies and faults have been pointed out: the tendency to develop unilinear schemes by snatching the required data, and the required data only, from any region and any culture which supplies one of the rungs of the ladder; the tendency to see in outwardly similar practices a same actuating motive; the tendency to assign irrational motives to supposedly irrational minds constructed on logical principles supposedly different from our own. The tendency of Dr. Schleiter's destructive criticism is actually constructive, and serves a useful purpose by pointing out the pitfalls and suggesting the kind of wariness that is demanded.

It is, as the title declares, in large part a critique of methods, and a helpful critique. The technically trained philosopher will be at home in these pages, but many a plain anthropologist will balk at the terminology. The whole work is given a metaphysical setting, which is all right; but it is, perhaps, not necessary to quote Hume on the meaning of cause, granted that problems of causation ultimately carry one back, or forward, into the realm of philosophy. So will anything. But anthropologists are timid and are apt to shy from a chapter which begins, as does the final one, with the statement that,

In some respects diametrically opposed to a certain peculiar unconsciousness of the articulating mechanism involving an immediate acceptance of the juxtaposi-

tion of elements, which we have been discussing, is a highly conscious and rationalistic enquiry in which the mind attempts to grasp, by acts of deliberate apprehension, the causes of an event and then launches out boldly upon a more or less boundless path.

It encourages a temptation to wonder whether that is what we have done.

The reviewer assuredly is not one who considers method as unimportant, or as standing apart from the value of the result. Method and result are intimately related. In the matter of method there is a better and a worse, a more fruitful and a less fruitful. Any incisive critique of methods is, therefore, a direct or indirect contribution to result.

Moreover, I do not take exception to any of Dr. Schleiter's inductions. He has shown the logical development of speculation upon various themes pertaining to religion, a logical development which has, if we select the data, a definite historical sequence. At the same time, one must wonder to what extent any deliberate and hard and fast method works—except for a time and in the hands of a given investigator occupied with his special problem.

Do these hard and fast methods yield more in attaining results than the rules of logic yield in the discovery of new philosophic truth? I doubt it. Just as the rules of logic follow upon the heels of thought, though at the same time embodying that thought, so method is, perhaps, what we derive after the problem has been successfully grappled with. Tylor was wrong in the sense that any genius is wrong whose day of activity has become a matter of history, and yet he was profoundly right in spite of his method no less than because of it. The worth of the investigation depends upon what can be made out of it, how the problem is unfolded, and the actual results revealed. A knowledge of sound method will help to secure fruitful results but will not insure them.

There is nothing in Dr. Schleiter's work to indicate that he would take exception to this view, though it is a point which he has not taken under consideration. If the result of his study of method is to show that method is relatively unimportant, and is generally an analysis after the fact, his labors will have had a profitable result. It is ultimately a question of the method by which we should deal with methods. And so I place myself sympathetically by the side of Dr. Schleiter.

WILSON D. WALLIS